1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

424 is a possible exception since he alone can exercise his magic; but here
756 too the feeling is not so much of ownership as of having obtained his magical equipment by inherent ability combined with a mystic experience. In the west the magician's power can be passed from father to son, or to some extent from mother's brother to sister's son, and a man can acquire his magical rituals from others; but essentially the concept of magical power is much like our modern concept of talent and ability.

435 The governing principle in the evaluation of objects which will be kept permanently by their owner is the ease with which they can be transported by human carriage or dugout canoe. The amount of labor consumed in their manufacture contributes in some degree to their high value as individual property, and the relative scarcity of an object in nature or in trade also makes its contributions to Murngin economic values; but the final desideratum is the relative ease of transportation [492] of the article, since this society has no domesticated beast of burden. Metal containers obtained in trade with white missionaries are extremely scarce and highly prized; yet if of very large size they will be given to someone remaining in camp or cut up and put to other uses.

181 The ultimate value is freedom of movement. Basically the largest
484 factor contributing to this value is the shifting food supply which necessitates change of location; but the feeling for change of location permeates the whole society and has become the most positive motivating factor in the thinking of any Australian aborigine, including the Murngin. All the white ranchers and frontier settlers know and have to make allowance for the partially acculturated blacks' uncontrollable desire "to take a walk about," chiefly under the compulsion of movement from place to place but also because of love for homeland and native culture. The desire to go to other places is forever present in the mental constitution of a black's behavior. If he is in his own clan land where he was born and where he grew to maturity—the center of his cultural heritage—he still feels the urge to go to the next horde or food ground. A flexible material culture and a like technological equipment must, and do, form his adaptation to the natural environment.

(For further consideration of this economic problem, particularly from the point of view of the selection or rejection of exotic articles from other cultures, the reader should see Appendix I, Social Change in North Australia.)

181 It might be argued that the factor of transportation did not prevent
796 a luxuriant growth of ceremonial paraphernalia, such as totemic emblems, grave posts, ceremonial objects of dress, etc. Although the native

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

does consider his ritualistic objects necessary aids to hunting and gathering activities, they are not directly used; and while ceremonial string and the smaller objects are frequently kept after a ritual, the larger objects are ceremonially destroyed by burial or fire, for which, it is most likely, the burden of carrying them is largely responsible. The natives give a mythological reason, and the concept of destruction does fit into the ideas underlying the ceremony; but the destruction was undoubtedly influenced by the necessity of either carrying or destroying a heavy object to prevent women from seeing it.

Whether the Murngin's position as nomadic hunters and gatherers can be historically explained by their having been out of contact with the main centers of civilization and therefore not having risen to the horticultural stage and acquired permanent residence, seems to the writer open to argument. The Cape York Peninsula people had constant communication with the New Guinea horticulturalists, yet did not acquire horticulture as a mode of earning a living, even though they did borrow many other elements from the New Guinea culture. Although the Malays must have been in contact with North Australia for a long period of time, the Murngin again took over only a very small part of their rather extensive material culture.

II. Man, a Species in a Biological Configuration

1. *Man, the Animal, Relating Himself to Nature*

Murngin man is but one species in the general biological configuration of plants and animals which is in constant state of adjustment to the inorganic world. This human animal is from one point of view a purely environmental thing in the same way that a eucalyptus tree, a mangrove jungle, and a species of kangaroo, etc., form the natural environment in which a Murngin lives. It is only by a process of abstracting man from the rest of the organic and inorganic world that we see him as a separate creature and create the useful dichotomy of heredity and environment.

The Murngin native eats, drinks, sleeps, excretes, copulates and reproduces his kind, is born and dies, as do the dingo, the kangaroo, or the other animals who move over the land with him. He affects his environmental world, but it largely controls his behavior; and, generally speaking, his place in the natural economy is largely the same as, let us say, that of the kangaroo, which is an idea the Murngin take as axiomatic. The kangaroo has his peculiar set of articulations

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

765 of the man's personal basket. A piece of a spear that has been broken
628 off and left in the body of the victim is also used as a relic. When a man has been wounded he sometimes soaks pieces of paper bark in his blood and presents them to his relatives to be used as reminders of their duty to compensate him for his injury by helping him kill or wound a member of the offending man's clan. When a man obtains one of the relics, it is an almost absolute demand on him to kill a member of the slayer's group. This is particularly true if it is given to a young man. The older men usually give their relics to the younger males.

765 The spirit of the dead is supposed to go with the relic, and the relic
778 has magic power. It can be thrown into an intended victim's fire and
789 cause him to go to sleep, or the possessor can blow his breath against it and produce the same effect. It is often carried in the mouth during a battle to make an opponent tired and heavy-footed and to prevent him from dodging spears. Relics play a prominent part in all feuds.

682 Occasionally men are killed within the clan, but this is not a cause for war or retaliation by members of the clan or by near relatives from without the clan. A man may be such a notorious killer and cause so much trouble for his own clansmen that the entire group will kill him to stop further disturbances. At times men are slain by their own
688 clan for breaking ceremonial taboos, such as divulging secrets of the old men to the women or the uninitiated, and for viewing ceremonial objects before their initiation.

672 If a fight is on and a near relative is accidentally hit by a club or
576 spear, the person responsible hits himself on the head while saying he is sorry. Here, too, the underlying idea is to inflict an injury on the responsible person similar to the one the injured party suffered.

152 Military honor also contributes its share to the causes for war. A man
577 will brave the spears of a whole clan to demonstrate his fearlessness. The writer has seen two brothers defy fifteen men in a spear fight. The Murngin people are a brave and courageous group. Fear of death
[626] while in a fight is seldom seen. A man who shows an unwillingness to fight is called a woman and held in extreme contempt.

628 The fundamental principle underlying all the causes of Murngin
681 warfare is that of reciprocity: if a harm has been done to an individual
181 or a group, it is felt by the injured people that they must repay the ones who have harmed them by an injury that at least equals the one they have suffered. When the total cultural situation of Murngin life is
181 further examined, this negative reciprocation is found to fit into a

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

larger reciprocation. In the chapters on Murngin kinship and local organization it was seen that the foundations of these structures are built entirely on reciprocity, and that the whole civilization might be described as in dynamic equilibrium. 181

Magic and War

Another belief centered around killing as a cause for war is that the spirit of the dead man enters the body of the killer and gives him double strength and actually increases his body size. When a man kills another during a tribal or interclan feud, he returns home and does not eat cooked food but subsists only on cold edibles until the soul of the dead man approaches him. He can hear the dead man's soul coming because the shaft of the spear which hangs from the stone head within the man drags on the ground and hits against the trees and bushes as he walks. When the spirit is very near, the killer can hear sounds coming from the dead man's wound (in a night fight the attacker usually strikes the sleeper's gullet). 775

The killer, ordinarily a young man and very frightened, in his fear runs to the camp of the old men. An old man tells him that he should not be afraid, but return and take the spear with which he has killed the man, remove the spear head, and put the spear end of the shaft between his own big toe and the toe next to it. The other end of the shaft is placed against his left shoulder. The left foot and side of the killer are used if he is right-handed, and the right side is used if he is left-handed. This is done so that the dead man's soul will not be afraid of the hand that killed its body. 775 788

The soul then enters the socket where the spear head was, and pushes its way upward into the leg of the killer, and finally into the body. It walks like an ant. It finally enters the stomach and shuts it up. The man feels sick and his abdomen becomes feverish. The killer rubs his stomach and calls out the proper name of the man he has killed (not his totem name, but his profane name). This cures him and he becomes normal again, for the spirit leaves the stomach and enters his heart. When the spirit enters the heart it has the same effect as if the blood of the dead man had been given to the killer. It is as though the man, before he died, had given his life's blood (powers, physical and spiritual) to the man who was to kill him. 775

The slayer, grown larger and exceedingly strong, acquires all the life strength the dead man once possessed. When the slayer dreams, the soul tells him that he has food for him and gives directions where 775 787

Matthew Flinders had already recorded evidence which he had found as far south as Vanderlin Island in the Sir Edward Pellew Group on the southern shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria, of previous visits by some Asiatic people. 174

From the general demeanour of the natives of the Gulf of Carpentaria, as recorded by Flinders in the narrative of his voyages, it is highly probable that praus from Indonesia had visited Arnhem Land, at least sporadically, for a very long time, much longer than the statement made to Flinders would suggest. But even on the information which he recorded, we know that regular voyages to Australia occurred at least as far back as about 1780.

The Australian aborigines are extremely conservative, and before absorbing any important element of culture, social or material, they generally give it a place in their myth pattern and bring it within the totemic scheme. This provides a background in tradition and so gives a charter for its use. The importance of this will be appreciated more readily when the account of the social organisation in Eastern Arnhem Land, which follows on pp. 8-13, has been read. 177 181

But in few cases where exchange of goods takes place is 431
the matter as simple as this. In almost all, the ceremonial 435
accompaniment is the important factor, and the exchange
or trade, the hard, matter-of-fact, economic aspect of the
transaction, is to the Arnhemlander, relatively unimportant.
Reduced to the level of mere "commerce"—the exchange of
commodities, their value balanced against one another,
shorn of the vital ceremonial, the transaction loses much of
its meaning and interest to the native. To him it is the prep- [181]
aration for a visit to relatives within the ceremonial ex-
change cycle to discharge his obligations, the journey,
the ritual, the formalities to be observed on arriving
at the camp, the niceties of behaviour and etiquette,
rather than the actual *gerri*, the goods themselves, that he
values. So that in any appreciation of the economic life and
exchange system of these people, in any study of their pro-
duction of wealth and distribution or circulation of objects
of material value, due regard must be placed on the psy-
chological and social attitudes, which dominate and often
mask and obscure, the undercurrent of economic exchange.
Yet inside the framework of the kinship system and the
clan organisation, within the exacting totemic scheme, each
man carries on a system of exchange of *gerri*, of gift and
counter gift, so that he is obliged to spend much of his
working life in preparations to discharge obligations im-
posed upon him by the system into which he is born.

But in spite of this stress on the *traditional*, on the 421
ritual and ceremonial aspects, the emphasis on etiquette
and behaviour, there is no suggestion here of the "primi-
tive communism" which looms large in the references which
occur in text books to the economic life of the people at
the level of culture of the aborigines. The very words

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943)1949
OI17 Murngin OI17

5.

THE CEREMONIAL EXCHANGE CYCLE IN ARNHEM LAND

When a newcomer in Arnhem Land settles down among the people, he quickly becomes familiar with the material culture and technology and is struck by the localised and restricted nature of the distribution of certain elements and minor traits and even of technological materials, and by the extreme conservatism of the people.

In the case of certain elements—in particular, the *mintji*, the magnificent patterns in polychrome, the totemic designs which are the hereditary property, the "copyright", of a group called by these people, *barpuro*, (a clan or an aggregation of clans, linked by the possession of common totemic ancestors)—this is understandable. Anything, whether social or material, which touches the solidarity of these closely-integrated groups, is jealously guarded, and its infringement bitterly resented and quickly avenged.[31] So that prudence, as well as conservatism, plays a part in restricting

[31] Sometimes this may be averted by expiatory or conciliatory payments of food or *gerri* to appease the injured or offended sentiments of the individual or group, which serve to restore a state of *euphoria* or ritual goodwill. But these presentations are invariably carried out in a ritual or ceremonial manner which gives them the stamp of formal approval of the society acting as a group and so lifts them above the level of mere personal or private feuds.

184 424 614 the free use of certain elements, because they are regarded as the special prerogative of one clan or group of clans. This applies most strongly to matters which relate to clan totemism, but in material culture it may extend even to such [226] things as the technique of fish capture, the right to practise some specialised method of fishing, such as the *gorl*,[32] which have been developed in adaptation to peculiar local conditions and which are regarded as the exclusive property of the members of one clan or group of clans, who alone have the traditional right, not merely to fish in one territory, but even the exclusive right to practise the technique itself. In the case of the *gorl*, which is one of the most specialised methods of fish capture found anywhere in the world, this can easily be explained, for the technique is used only in one area on the Glyde River where it is localised in the territory of one or possibly of two, clans, and is therefore regarded as under protection of the *wänärr*, the ancestors of the clan or clans concerned.

184 424 [688] [685] [628] The restriction of the use of such traits and specialised techniques as the *gorl*, which are jealously guarded, and of which any infringement is bitterly resented and visited by vengeance, often leading to fighting and interclan feud, rests upon the belief that the heritage which its members have received from the *wänärr*, the ancestors of the clan, has been infringed, and that its solidarity has suffered damage thereby, rather than from economic motives such as the desire to monopolise food supplies, raw materials, or *gerri*, as with civilised man.

181 184 Even apart from these matters which touch on the solidarity of groups and which therefore restrict the distribution of a trait or process, the people are extremely

[113] [32] See Donald F. Thomson, *A New Type of Fish Trap from Arnhem Land, Northern Territory of Australia*, Man, 1938, No. 216.

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943)1949
OI17 Murngin OI17

conservative, and this fact leaves a strong local stamp on their material culture. Certain types of utensils may be found only in one local area, and even spears, of which about 30 different types occur in Arnhem Land, can often be distinguished by a local preference for such minor traits as the use of one particular bast fibre (*duiyärrk*) for lashing, or of one resin—whether *notjamän*, (*Canarium australasicum*), *maipin bortj*[33] (*Erythrophloeum*), or the hard, brittle, black resin of *lännapu*, (*Callitris*), "Cyprus Pine", for each of which there may be a strong bias in a certain local area. The use of such materials is laid down by tradition, and the aboriginal craftsman is conservative, not much given to experiment. He follows the pattern which is traditional because he believes it was established by the *wänärr* (his totemic ancestors).

In contrast with this extreme conservatism in the use of raw materials and in the technique employed in material culture, it is sometimes surprising to find suddenly, in an area as remote from outside contacts as far Eastern and Central Arnhem Land were when I first went to live with these people in 1935, 36 and 37, such elements as boomerangs, (*källi-gälli*), which are not made in this territory, bearing all the marks of authenticity of specimens from Katherine or Daly Waters—some two or three hundred miles away to the south or south-west. And these are accompanied by such articles as the closely-woven forehead fillets called *källämba*, heavy and closely-woven "bibs" or aprons called *mätta mätta*, *märtät* or *tjänauwo*, worn around the neck, suspended on the chest during fights, and *bäkkürämma* or *bäkka* (spears, having heads of ironwood with very long

[33] *Bortj* is really liver and is apparently applied to this resin on account of the practice of moulding it into large lumps suggesting the lobes of a liver.

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
OI17 Murngin OI17

a member of the Yiritcha moiety, marries his mother's brother's daughter, he is marrying a woman of the Balang subsection and Dua moiety, and also of a local clan different from his own, as will be shown later. 177 616 617

This is possibly somewhat confusing to the reader, and to all who do not possess an understanding of aboriginal social organization. But I can vouch for the fact that the system is intelligible and quite logical, and those who tend to regard the Aborigines as a low type, or of poor intelligence, must reconcile that opinion with the fact that the north-east Arnhem Land Aborigines not only understand the system, and make it work in everyday life, but that they adjusted this new grouping to their own kinship and marriage rules and to their dual organization.

I have enlarged on this matter, not only to give some idea of the background of behaviour in the region, but also to suggest that in matters of importance to themselves, the Aborigines are just as intelligent and logical as we are. It is our ignorance of their world of thought which often causes us to regard them as low in the scale of intelligence, when, as a matter of fact, we are not acting very intelligently in judging them without a thorough knowledge of the facts. 181

The Aborigines and their Country

Here and there Mr Chaseling mentions hordes and sacred wells. This introduces us to the fundamental unit of the social and even 'political' organization. The tribe as an organization of clans or hordes does not really exist in this region. Instead there are a number of local groups, each occupying on the average about 360 square miles of country, loosely bound together by the fact that they possess in common certain features of social organization, for example, the kinship system, marriage rule, eight-subsection system, and the dual organization (or division of the community into two groups for certain ceremonial and social purposes); 619 614

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

conclusion that in north-east Arnhem Land, the natives really did know the physiological facts, but were not interested in them; they were only interested in 'spiritual conception', which established a person's place in the social and religious structure of the tribe. But whatever be the degree of knowledge or ignorance regarding the physiological facts, there is no doubt that the accepted spiritual doctrine is one of pre-existence. The unborn spirits sojourn at the totemic well waiting to be incarnated, or reincarnated; to that centre they will return after death; and without the entry of the pre-existent spirit child into the womb, there could be no conception.

Everyday Matters

Mr Chaseling is not concerned with discussing complex social and religious problems. His aim is to help us know the Aboriginal as he is. To this end he provides much information regarding interesting everyday affairs. There is no smoke-signal code in this region, and message sticks are simply aids to memory. The Aborigines like having visitors and are anxious to keep them. Like the rest of us, they are subject to flattery, and they use a highly developed form of praise in asking for favours. The status of the women is low, but some affection is shown between spouses; moreover, women do exercise an important influence on affairs; for they live longer on the average than the man (they are not killed in 'wars'), and as a result accumulate a greater knowledge of the everyday myths and legends and of the clan's enemies and friends. There are about three females to each male, another consequence of 'warfare', and connected with this is the fact that usually a man has three wives; but there are a few cases of men with up to twelve wives.

These and many like facts are recorded in the pages which follow, pages which will do much to help readers appreciate the Aborigines of north-east Arnhem Land as human beings,

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
OI17 Murngin OI17

797 on the new settlement, where ordinary and ancient nomadic law did not provide for the needs in a new and developing communal life. Nevertheless, I determined not to attempt to enforce it by approaching the Yulengor in the dual role of policeman-missionary, with a gun in one hand and a Bible in the other. The broad instructions given me were: 'Work along from day to day and do the best you can', and having thus more or less a free hand, I decided to try a thorough-going pacifism, though I must admit that I was doubtful if it would make any impression under these adverse conditions. Physical force was not used in any way as a means of control, although in several instances youths may possibly have deserved something of the sort for deliberate destructiveness. Taking a long chance, I declared the station neutral ground, and though fighting and quarrelling were not directly forbidden, those who wanted to fight were told to 'fight it out' on an old camping-ground twenty miles away. Such unheard of neutrality was altogether quixotic to notoriously warlike hordes, and maybe they were nonplussed by the novelty of it and came into the way of accepting it.

[926]
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